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INTRODUCTION

“The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice.”

— ***Deus Caritas Est, God is Love (28)***—

“They handed him the Roman coin. He said to them, ‘Whose image is this and whose inscription?’ They replied, ‘Caesar’s.’ At that he said to them, ‘Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God’” (Mt 22:17-21)

At times, it seems as though we have been trapped by a misconception that faith and politics are competitors, two swords that are locked in a constant battle for the loyalty, hearts and obedience of the people. The fight between these two giants has sparked some of the most violent events and wars of our history. And with recent events in the Middle East and throughout much of the Muslim world, we still cannot consign these events into history. Our world continues to be plagued by the struggle between religions and state, yet when Jesus was asked about this question of loyalty, to whom is our allegiance strongest, he did not enter the fight, responding: “Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God” (Mt 22:21).

Jesus’ enemies had come to trap him, to brand him as either a blasphemer or traitor to the state. He deftly brushed aside the issue, not simply as a way of escaping a volatile subject, but because it is not a question of government versus God, or of removing each party to their respective corners. Paying taxes is not a

question of allegiance because there is no choice between God and Caesar. We are asked to give our proper loyalty to both.

Here, I have often found great comfort and direction from words of St. Joan of Arc which she spoke at her condemnation trial: “So long as God is first served.”

Everything in creation finds fulfillment and its good in being directed toward God. No matter what your philosophy of government may be, whether its empirical, democratic, or even communist, Caesar and all governments remain part of creation and so fit into this same mission and service. It is not so much a divine right to govern, as a divine purpose in governing. The question then, is: Where do they find inspiration? How does the government, and our leaders in government, find direction toward God?

Beginning to answer these questions is the first goal of this book; to provide an introduction through scripture and *Catholic Social Teaching* that encourages questions, sparks discussion and spurs a deeper curiosity into the relationship between our faith and the political choices we face. Whether or not our our faith has a role in government and our political decisions is actually not a very good question to begin with--Faith and politics have to mix! By their very nature, by our nature as human beings, it is actually impossible for our beliefs in God, how He made this world and His ambitions for us, and our beliefs in our government, its purpose, how it is to act and its relationship to the people, not to mix.

There is, in fact, no other way for us to even exist. To do so

would be like suggesting that our country's foreign policy should be completely separate from any domestic policies, or that whatever faith we may have has no effect on any works we may do for others. To keep faith and politics separate would be to say that whatever faith we profess in church on Sundays is left at the doorstep and does not effect any of our life throughout the rest of the week. In this increasingly digital and shrinking world, we know that such isolation is simply not possible: foreign policies effect oil prices abroad and gas prices at home, economic policies toward China effect the numbers of jobs and even the safety of products we buy here, a law passed in the U.S. to label the national origin of meat effected the lives of thousands of farmers and food prices across the country as Canada places exorbitant tariffs on American meat--it is not in our nature to be completely independent and unaffected by others. This is a reality that Christ revealed in his response to a question of taxes, and in so many other ways, described a reality in which, for better or for worse, we are united in one body and what effects one part will have some effect on every other.

The second goal of these essays is to gain a better vision of how our actions and the living conditions in this world are an integral part of salvation and the manifestation of God's Kingdom on earth. We are soulful and physical beings, created in *spirit* and in *flesh*. This means that our hope for eternal life with God also includes the hope for a better world on earth. While all remains God's work, the coming and gift of His Kingdom is not isolated from our actions.

We know this simply by paying attention to the activity of our day-to-day life. When we smile and treat others with kindness, we increase their joy and kindness; if we treat someone harshly, they become agitated and more caustic in their treatment of others. While God remains the ultimate Love, love comes into this world through us and our actions with others. Our expression of love and faith transforms life on this earth toward the promises of heaven and the fulfillment of God's plan for humanity.

This work of manifesting God's Kingdom is not found in a government that reflects the precise laws of a church, but through the people who direct the government toward a better society. Governments remain good so long as they use their unique gifts of governing for the preservation of human dignity and freedom for all people, and pursuit of the *Common Good*. Governments are, and can be good in so far as the people who run them express their goodness and virtues.

Finally, Christians, and Catholics, will disagree on candidates and policy choices, not because of their moral values, but because of how we believe they will impact and shape our society. Our mission through Christ is the same whether we're talking about the political, economic or social aspects of society: To bring the love of Christ to others, to seek reconciliation, to embrace and ensure human dignity of all people, to act toward healing and unity, to strive for freedom, justice and peace, to promote life and fight against all that is inherently opposed to life, to reach out to those in most dire need, call out for those whose voices cannot be heard and use the gifts that God's Spirit has granted to us for the

good of His Kingdom.

In the end, we are asked to remember and remind one another that in God we have the promise of eternal life and a Kingdom “that is not of this world.” Yet He remains relevant to the mundane challenges and complexities of this world, hoping to transcend the conditions of today through the works of our hands, our faith and the fruits of our love for one another.